United Nations A/53/430

General Assembly

Distr.: General
24 September 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session
Agenda item 26
Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 52/4 of 22 October 1997.

II. Consultations between representatives of the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and representation at meetings

2. On 2 October 1997, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) held their annual coordination meeting at United Nations Headquarters to discuss the agenda of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, in particular those items of concern and interest to OIC.

3. The Secretary-General of the United Nations addressed the coordinating meeting of OIC Foreign Ministers. It was the first time that a United Nations Secretary-General had addressed such a coordinating meeting. The Secretary-General of the Arab League also addressed and took part in the meeting.

4. The coordinating meeting, which unanimously admitted Togo as the 55th member State of OIC, reviewed the international situation, with specific attention to the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Jammu and Kashmir; Afghanistan; Somalia; the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan; the consequences of Iraq's occupation of Kuwait; and the situation pertaining to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Security Council resolutions 731 (1992) and 883 (1993). The coordinating meeting also discussed the issue of United Nations reform. In response to an invitation from OIC, senior representatives of the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat attended the meeting.

5. The Secretary-General of the United Nations attended the Eighth OIC Summit, which was held at Tehran from 9 to 11 December 1997. During the Summit, the Secretary-General conferred with a number of heads of delegation and other senior participants in the Summit, including OIC Secretary-General Dr. Azeddine Laraki, as well as the new Chairman of OIC, President Seyed Mohammad Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

6. At the twenty-fifth meeting of Foreign Ministers of OIC, which was convened at Doha from 15 to 19 March 1998, the Secretary-General was represented by his Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi.

7. During the period under review, cooperation on political matters intensified between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, in particular with regard to ongoing peacemaking efforts. Regular consultations were held, and information was exchanged between the secretariats of the United Nations and OIC, including on the situations in Somalia and Tajikistan. Regarding the peace process in Tajikistan, it should be recalled that OIC participated as an observer in the United Nations-sponsored inter-Tajik talks that were concluded in 1997 with the signing of the General Agreement. OIC is a member of the contact group established in connection with the peace process in Tajikistan.

8. A new dimension of cooperation between the United Nations and OIC was added concerning the conflict in Afghanistan. Following the twenty-fifth OIC Foreign Ministers meeting, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Mr. Brahimi, and the Permanent Observer of OIC to the United Nations, Ambassador Mokhtar Lamani, conducted a joint United Nations/OIC peacemaking mission to Afghanistan and a number of neighbouring countries. This mission, which lasted from 20 March to 15 April 1998, was followed by a series of meetings of the Afghan parties, held at Islamabad under joint United Nations and OIC auspices from 26 April to 3 May 1998. Despite the inconclusive ending of these talks, the co-chairmanship by the two organizations underlined the valuable potential of concrete joint cooperation in the field of peacemaking, which could be applied beyond the conflict in Afghanistan.

9. On 28 and 29 July 1998, the Secretary-General of the United Nations convened a high-level meeting of regional organizations (including OIC) with which the United Nations has cooperated in preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping. The agenda of this third meeting with regional organizations focused on the topic of early warning and conflict prevention in the twenty-first century, as well as the capabilities of the United Nations and regional organizations in the field of early warning and conflict prevention. It was agreed during this two-day meeting that cooperation in this field between the United Nations and regional organizations, including OIC, will continue at the working level. An appropriate follow-up meeting is already envisaged to take place later in 1998, in which OIC is expected to take part.

III. General meeting of the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its specialized institutions

10. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/4 of 22 October 1997, a general meeting on cooperation between representatives of the secretariats of the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions was held at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 13 to 15 July 1998. Substantive preparations for this meeting were initiated by the coordinating secretariats of the United Nations and OIC. In accordance with the agreement between the coordinating secretariats, the meeting adopted the following agenda at its opening session:

1. Organization of work.
2. Review of cooperation in the political dimension.
3. Review of cooperation and appraisal of progress achieved in priority areas of cooperation:
   (a) Development of science and technology;
   (b) Trade and development;
   (c) Technical cooperation among Islamic countries;
   (d) Assistance to refugees;
   (e) Food security and agriculture;
   (f) Education and eradication of illiteracy;
   (g) Investment mechanisms and joint ventures;
   (h) Human resources development;
   (i) Environment;
   (j) Development of arts and crafts and promotion of heritage.
4. Consideration of proposals for enhancing the mechanisms of cooperation between the United Nations system and OIC and its institutions.
5. Other matters.
6. Adoption of the final report.

11. The meeting had before it working papers prepared by the participating organizations, agencies and institutions of the two organizations. The 10 issues listed under agenda item 3 of the general meeting, "Review of cooperation and appraisal achieved in priority areas of cooperation", constitute the agreed priority areas of cooperation between the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized agencies. During the general meeting, which was held concurrently with a meeting of focal points established for the priority areas, informal working groups composed of representatives of the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions were established. Based on the discussions in these working groups, which centred around the working papers prepared by the two organizations, the general meeting, *inter alia*, reached agreement on a wide-ranging programme of cooperative activities to be accomplished in the period 1998–1999. The conclusions and recommendations of the meeting were contained in its final report, which was unanimously adopted on 15 July 1998 (copies of the final report were made available and distributed to all participants from the United Nations and OIC immediately after the last session of the general meeting on 15 July 1998).

12. Representatives of the following departments of the United Nations and other organizations and bodies of the United Nations system participated in the meeting: Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Department of Political Affairs; Department of Public Information; International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); International Labour Organization (ILO); International Telecommunication Union; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Industrial Development Organization; United Nations Institute for Training and Research; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); World Bank; World Food Programme.

13. Representatives of the following organizations and institutions of OIC participated in the meeting: Department of Economic Affairs; Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT); Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO); Islamic Institute of Technology (IIT); Islamic Solidarity Fund (ISF); Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI); OIC general secretariat; Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA); Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC).

14. The increased political cooperation between the United Nations and OIC was also confirmed during the general meeting. The heads of the United Nations and OIC delegations attending the general meeting conducted a wide-ranging and substantive exchange of views about

cooperation in the field of preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. The discussion was held on the basis of a working paper prepared by the OIC secretariat. There was broad agreement on the value of regular political consultations between the two organizations, including at the level of Secretary-General. It was noted that OIC was planning to participate in the third meeting between the United Nations and a number of regional organizations scheduled for 28 and 29 July 1998 at United Nations Headquarters.

15. During the meeting, the OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Ibrahim Bakr, expressed appreciation for the enhanced level of cooperation in the political field, especially regarding the peace process in Afghanistan, in which OIC and the United Nations have undertaken a number of common initiatives. It was agreed that the United Nations and OIC would continue to cooperate closely in the search for peace in Afghanistan. The discussion also included exchanges of views on the topics of Palestine, Tajikistan, Somalia, Jammu and Kashmir, Armenia-Azerbaijan, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Kosovo. There was broad satisfaction about the prospects of further cooperation in the political field, and both sides were looking forward to the next round of regular consultations in New York in early October 1998.

IV. Follow-up action on recommendations of the meetings between the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, including cooperation in the field of economic and social development

16. Outlined below is a summary of contributions received for the present report from entities of the United Nations system.

A. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

17. During the period June 1997–May 1998, FAO continued its cooperation with some of the specialized and affiliated institutions of OIC, namely the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), SESRTCIC, ISESCO and ICDT. Cooperation between FAO and these OIC institutions focused on areas of common interest, such as rural development and food security, training in agricultural policy analysis, and the trade of fish products.

18. The FAO Director-General attended the Eighth OIC Summit held at Tehran from 9 to 11 December 1997.

B. International Fund for Agricultural Development

19. The collaboration between IFAD and OIC was formalized in 1983 through a cooperation agreement in which the two organizations pledged to exchange information and conduct periodic consultations to promote joint programmes related to agricultural development and rural poverty alleviation. The working partnership has taken many forms. Of the 51 members of OIC, 47 are also members of IFAD. They play a key role in framing the Fund's policies and priorities, make up over 40 per cent of all IFAD borrowers and have been, for a total of US$ 880.6 million, major contributors to the Fund's resources. In addition, co-financing has been provided by IDB for 14 projects in 11 Islamic countries and by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund in six countries and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) in eight. Technical assistance grants totalling US$ 34.5 million have supported applied research in fields of particular relevance to many Islamic countries, while IFAD-initiated workshops and seminars have facilitated the exchange of information and ideas between OIC countries and the Fund.

20. IFAD-designed and -supported projects in Islamic countries have taken a variety of forms, although all share the Fund's basic approach: targeting resources to the most vulnerable of the rural poor, promoting the active participation of the people in their own development and striving to set the foundations for sustainable development. A number have focused on pastoral management and conservation of rangelands, sustainable patterns of land and water resources use, combating environmental degradation and assistance to drought-displaced persons. As the focus is determined by local conditions and the needs of particular target groups, so are the means employed. These include credit for investment in productive on- and off-farm enterprises, better access to improved technologies, services and training in more effective farm and range practices, and strengthening the capacity of national and local institutions to serve the rural poor.

C. International Labour Organization

21. The relations between the ILO and OIC date from 1980, and have been further strengthened since the inception of general consultations between the United Nations system and OIC in 1993. ILO supports national development efforts of individual OIC member States through its technical assistance programme. It maintains close working relations with pertinent regional and subregional organizations, such as the League for Arab States, the Arab Labour Organization and the Executive Bureau of the Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States. ILO participates in the annual meetings of the Board of Governors of the Islamic Development Bank. The organization also attaches great importance to the promotion of cooperation and the exchange of information.

D. United Nations Children's Fund

22. In pursuance of the 1989 cooperation agreement between OIC and UNICEF and the 1996 memorandum of understanding signed between ISESCO and UNICEF, children's issues continue to retain high visibility on the political agenda in the Islamic world. This manifested itself amply during the eighth OIC Summit at Tehran in December 1997, at which UNICEF conducted its advocacy at the apex level.

23. Reaffirming the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, the two organizations, including the subsidiary organization ISESCO, rededicated their efforts to ensure the survival, protection and well-being of children in the Islamic world, and adopted a resolution on child care and protection in the Islamic world.

24. In calling for a ministerial meeting to be convened on the subject, the OIC Summit reiterated its commitment to child care and child rights in Islam. At the country level, member States of OIC translate global commitments through in-country programmes and projects, in fulfilment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Year 2000 goals. In addition, ISESCO and UNICEF will be meeting in 1998 to determine cooperation with respect to projects relating to children with disabilities and girls' education.

25. Meaningful implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and national plans of action by all OIC member States still remain a challenge. This can be achieved through the sharing of information, technical resources, success stories and the harmonization of national laws with the articles and provisions of the Convention.

E. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

26. UNESCO has continued its cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its specialized institutions, notably ISESCO. UNESCO participated in the biennial general meeting between the United Nations system and the OIC system, which was held at Geneva from 13 to 15 July 1998. UNESCO is the focal point for the United Nations on two of the priority areas agreed upon, namely education and the eradication of illiteracy, and human resources development.

27. UNESCO continued, through the period under review, to refine the modalities of cooperation with the OIC system and to expand the areas of cooperation. Exchange of information and visits between programme specialists and frequent contacts at the highest level gave a particular impetus to cooperation between UNESCO and the OIC system, in particular ISESCO. The Joint UNESCO/ISESCO Committee held its fifth session in Paris from 23 to 26 March 1998, and elaborated a programme of activities for 1998–1999. The programme was signed by the two Directors-General in Paris on 17 July 1998. The programme, which includes about 80 jointly financed and executed projects, went beyond the priority areas mentioned above to include science and technology, culture and communication, as well as cooperation in the preparation and convening of major UNESCO conferences on higher education (1998), vocational training (1999), science (1999) and communication (2000), and on transdisciplinary programmes, such as the culture of peace.

28. On 19 February 1998, the UNESCO Director-General and the Secretary-General of OIC signed a special agreement between the two organizations on assistance to the Palestinian People and on safeguarding the cultural heritage of Jerusalem. UNESCO continued to cooperate with IRCICA and other subsidiary bodies of OIC, and to provide assistance to OIC member States through UNESCO participation programme.

F. United Nations Environment Programme

29. Since the signing of the memorandum of understanding with OIC and the cooperation agreement with ISESCO in 1990 and 1996, respectively, UNEP cooperation with OIC

has progressed in several areas of mutual interest. UNEP attended the General Conference of ISESCO (Riyadh, 6–9 December 1997) and the twenty-first session of the Islamic Commission for Economic, Social and Cultural Affairs (Jeddah, 9–13 January 1998).

30. A UNEP/ISESCO training of trainers workshop on environmental education was held in Bahrain (12–19 October 1997) with participation from 10 Arab, Asian and African Islamic countries. The Workshop focused on the introduction of environmental education into the educational programmes in these countries, and reviewed and appraised the countries' experiences in emphasizing the Islamic perspective in environmental education.

31. Furthermore, a series of three topical seminars and a conference on the theme "Environment and Islam: towards an ethical environmental charter" was proposed by UNEP, and is being pursued as a joint UNEP/ISESCO initiative supported by the Islamic Development Bank and the Faysal Islamic Bank. The first preparatory meeting for this activity was convened in Bahrain on 10 December 1997, and the proposal is now being circulated to other Islamic institutions and potential donors for support. UNEP considers this activity an extremely important event aiming at building environmental protection work on the basis of the spiritual and cultural values of the Islamic world.

G. United Nations Population Fund

32. As in the past and in accordance with its mandate, UNFPA has continued to provide technical assistance to most member States of the OIC in which population programmes and activities were funded. In addition, UNFPA has continued to cooperate with OIC through the funding of joint activities with ISESCO. In 1996, further to signing a cooperation agreement with ISESCO, UNFPA approved a project in the approximate amount of $194,000 to strengthen population education in ISESCO's action plan and enhance the capacity of its member States to advocate gender, reproductive health and reproductive rights issues. Within the framework of this project, two symposiums, one on the theme "Muslim women's education" and the other on the theme "Human rights and reproductive rights in Islam" were held at Al-Azhar University in June and November 1997, respectively. Both symposiums benefited from the technical assistance of the Amman-based UNFPA country support team.

33. For future cooperation, it was agreed at the last United Nations/OIC general meeting at Geneva (13–15 July 1998) that UNFPA will continue to work with OIC institutions in support of population and reproductive health activities to advance the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action in the Muslim world. This would be done through workshops, conferences, symposiums, expert meetings, printing and translation of relevant materials.

H. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

34. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to maintain a cooperative working relationship with OIC. UNRWA benefits from the ongoing support of OIC for its efforts to provide essential services and humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees. Cooperation between UNRWA and OIC is reinforced by meetings between representatives of the two organizations, including with the Commissioner-General of UNRWA. The Agency plans to deepen contact with the OIC secretariat and with the Islamic Development Bank, *inter alia*, by regularly providing information on Agency activities.

35. UNRWA has long-standing working relationships with a number of OIC member States, in particular the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, where the Agency is engaged in extensive operations to provide services to 2.1 million Palestine refugees. Those Governments, as well as the Governments of Turkey and the Arab Republic of Egypt, are members of UNRWA's Advisory Commission. UNRWA has also established a close working relationship with the Palestinian Authority in respect of services provided to the 1.3 million Palestine refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

36. UNRWA continues to benefit from the support of OIC member States to the Agency's regular budget and special assistance programmes. Since the relocation of Agency headquarters to the area of operations in July 1996, the Commissioner-General has paid official visits to several OIC member States in the Gulf region and South-East Asia, including Bahrain, Brunei Darussalam, Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

I. World Meteorological Organization

37. A number of technical assistance projects were and are being implemented in OIC member States and areas such as Algeria, Chad, Gaza and the West Bank, Guinea-Bissau, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Morocco,

the Niger, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. These projects are financed through different schemes, particularly UNDP and trust fund arrangements. Most of these projects are aimed at promoting sustainable development through the provision of meteorological and hydrological services to agriculture, water resources management and protection of the environment.

38. In addition, a number of consultancy missions financed through UNDP and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Voluntary Cooperation Programme (VCP) were organized in a number of member countries in Africa, Asia and the Arab States. Fellowships were awarded in the fields of meteorology and hydrology to a number of trainees in OIC members and financed through WMO-VCP and the regular budget, in particular in Palestine. Within the framework of WMO-VCP, equipment, expert services, spare parts and consumables were provided to national meteorological services of 10 OIC members during the reporting period.

J. Other departments and organizations of the United Nations system

39. A number of departments and organizations of the United Nations system, including the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), conveyed information to the United Nations Secretariat on their programmes and activities in cooperation with OIC and its specialized institutions.

United Nations A/53/431

General Assembly

Distr.: General
25 September 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session
Agenda item 18
Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Letter dated 15 September 1998 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Saint Kitts and Nevis to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The present letter is submitted further to a request by nine countries for the inclusion in the provisional agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly of an item to review General Assembly resolution 2758 (XXVI) of 25 October 1971 on the representation of China at the United Nations.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis associates with and continues to applaud the significant steps the government of the Republic of China on Taiwan has been making in advancing the human condition in social, economic and political terms, not only within its own geographical boundaries but also in far-flung corners of the globe. These critical successes, bolstered by the strong democratic institutions on Taiwan, must be complemented and encouraged within the context of greater cooperation and understanding from the international fraternity of nations.

The tremendous progress of the Chinese people on Taiwan cannot be ignored, nor can we afford to isolate the significance of their propelling developments. Their commitment and willingness to work within the rules governing democratic, law-abiding countries augur well for greater prosperity in terms of human development, peaceful coexistence and security in Asia. We encourage both sides of the Taiwan Straits to work to develop new and dynamic strategies that are practical, contemporary and appropriate to the current situation, guided by the reality that the huge Chinese population on Taiwan represents a significant voice in the world.

With reference to the intention of the co-sponsors of the draft resolution, the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis, in recognizing the importance of resolving the issue, welcomes the decision by both sides on the Taiwan Straits to resume talks later this year. We believe that the historical and current dynamism of the Chinese people suggests a capability to arrive at a practical resolution that will lend substance to the collective aspirations of all Chinese and allow the world community to benefit from their experience, expertise and goodwill.

98-28239 (E) 280998

I have the further honour to request that the present note be circulated as a General Assembly document under agenda item 18 of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Kevin M. **Isaac**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

United Nations A/53/431/Corr.1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
9 October 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session
Agenda item 10
Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization

Letter dated 15 September 1998 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Saint Kitts and Nevis to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Corrigendum

The agenda item should read as above.

98-30077 (E) 121098

United Nations A/53/432

General Assembly

Distr.: General
25 September 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session
Agenda item 110 (a)
Human rights questions: implementation of human rights instruments

Effective implementation of international instruments on human rights, including reporting obligations under international instruments on human rights

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the report of the persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies on their tenth meeting, held at Geneva from 14 to 18 September 1998, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/118 of 12 December 1997.

98-28327 (E) 231098

Annex

Report of the persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies on their tenth meeting

I. Introduction

1. Since the adoption of its resolution 37/44 on 3 December 1982, the General Assembly has continuously kept under review the issue of the effective implementation of international instruments on human rights, including reporting obligations under international instruments. Those matters have also received careful attention during the various sessions of the treaty bodies, at some of the meetings of States parties and at meetings of other organs such as the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Human Rights.

2. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 38/117 of 16 December 1983, the Secretary-General convened the first meeting of the persons chairing the bodies entrusted with the consideration of State party reports in August 1984. The report on that meeting was submitted to the General Assembly at its thirty-ninth session (A/39/484, annex). The second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth meetings were convened by the Secretary-General biannually from 1988 until 1994 and, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/178 of 23 December 1994, annually since 1995.

3. In its resolution 52/118 of 12 December 1997, the General Assembly welcomed the report of the persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies on their eighth meeting, held at Geneva from 15 to 19 September 1997 (A/52/507, annex), and took note of their conclusions and recommendations. The Assembly noted with appreciation the efforts of the persons chairing the treaty bodies, at their eighth meeting, to develop appropriate reforms of the reporting system, with a view to, *inter alia*, reducing the reporting burden on States parties while maintaining the quality of reporting, and encouraged them to continue those efforts, including through the continued examination of the benefits of reports focused on a limited range of issues and of opportunities for harmonizing the general guidelines regarding the form and content of reports, and the timing of consideration of reports and the methods of work of the treaty bodies. The General Assembly endorsed the request of the persons chairing the treaty bodies to hold an extraordinary meeting from 25 to 27 February 1998 to pursue the reform process with the aim of improving the effective implementation of international instruments on human rights. The report on that meeting (ninth meeting) is before the General Assembly at its fifty-third session (A/53/125).

4. The tenth meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies was convened by the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/118.

II. Organization of the meeting

5. The meeting was held at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 14 to 18 September 1998. The following representatives of the human rights treaty bodies attended: Charlotte Abaka (Vice-Chairperson, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women), Mahmoud Aboul-Nasr (Chairperson, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination), Philip Alston (Chairperson, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), Peter Thomas Burns (Chairperson, Committee against Torture), Omran El-Shafei (Vice-Chairperson, Human Rights Committee) and Sandra P. Mason (Chairperson, Committee on the Rights of the Child). Mr. Burns was elected Chairperson/Rapporteur of the meeting. At their first meeting the chairpersons adopted the agenda and the programme of work.

6. On behalf of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights declared the meeting open and addressed the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies on 14 September 1998. Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, participated in a closed meeting with the chairpersons on 18 September 1998, which was highly appreciated as it made it possible to continue the frank dialogue of previous meetings.

7. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and regional organizations participated in the meeting: Organization of American States (OAS); Organization of African Unity (OAU); Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for

Refugees (UNHCR); and World Health Organization (WHO).

8. The Director of the Information Service of the United Nations Office of Geneva informed the meeting of chairpersons about the ongoing information activities covering the work of all treaty bodies. To ensure better coverage of the meetings of treaty bodies, the Department of Public Information is planning (a) to continue working to make the activities of the committees better known, through radiocommunication with Geneva-based correspondents, making use of "points de presse"; (b) to prepare, for November 1998, an annual timetable for the six treaty bodies which would provide dates of meetings and list the State reports to be considered; this is to alert the press on the national level; and (c) to continue Department action to make television networks aware of the activities of the treaty bodies during public sessions.

9. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations attended the meeting: Amnesty International; Anti-Racism Information Service (ARIS); Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT); Baha'i International Community; Defence for Children International; Friends World Committee for Consultation; International Service for Human Rights; International Women's Rights Action Watch; Lawyers Committee for Human Rights; and NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

10. Gallegos Chiriboga, Vice-Chairperson of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights, and Yimer Aboye, member of the Bureau of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, addressed the meeting, as did Ms. Rishmawi, Chairperson of the fifth meeting of special rapporteurs and representatives, experts and chairpersons of working groups on the special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights and the Advisory Services Programme.

11. On 17 September 1998 the chairpersons convened a private meeting with the representatives of States parties to discuss ideas on how to improve the work of human rights treaty bodies and to promote implementation of their concluding observations. Fifty-five States parties were represented at the meeting, which provided a valuable opportunity for dialogue in relation to the role of the treaty bodies and their future evolution. The following issues were discussed: (a) the problem of human resources; the success in obtaining ratifications has not been accompanied by a growth in the human resources made available to meet the increased workload; (b) the serious backlog of communications in those committees having communications procedures; (c) two recent denunciations of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; (d) the backlog of State reports received and not yet examined; (e) the problem of overdue reports; and (f) the problem of giving effect to the recommendations of the expert committees. The chairpersons consider that informal consultations with States parties during their meetings are extremely useful and request the Secretariat to arrange for an informal consultation during their eleventh meeting.

12. The chairpersons further convened a private meeting with the internal Task Force of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, established with a mandate to facilitate and contribute to the parallel review of the United Nations mechanisms by the Commission on Human Rights and provide the Office of the High Commissioner with an input on measures to improve the effectiveness of the mechanisms. In this context, the chairpersons also had the opportunity to meet with Professor Anne Bayefsky of York University, Canada, who will conduct an academic study and review of the human rights treaty system for the Office of the High Commissioner.

13. Among the documents made available to the participants were the report of the Secretariat on universal ratification, improving the operation of the human rights treaty bodies, servicing of the treaty bodies and information technology;[1] the report of the Secretary-General on the status of the international human rights instruments and the general situation of overdue reports;[2] a background paper by the Division for the Advancement of Women on the integration of a gender perspective into the work of all treaty bodies;[3] and a proposal for a plan of action to strengthen the implementation of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

14. On 18 September 1998, the chairpersons considered the draft report on their tenth meeting. The report, as amended during the course of the meeting, was adopted unanimously.

15. The chairpersons tentatively agreed to hold their eleventh meeting at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 31 May to 4 June 1998, to coincide with the meeting of special rapporteurs and representatives, experts and chairpersons of working groups.

III. Composition of the treaty bodies

16. The chairpersons expressed strong concern at the geographical and gender imbalances reflected in the composition of certain of the treaty bodies. In particular, they noted that the number of African experts within two of the committees was entirely unsatisfactory. They recognized that the election of members of the treaty bodies was entirely a matter for the States parties. Nevertheless they called upon States parties to make a concerted effort to remedy the imbalances.

IV. Review of recent developments relating to the work of the treaty bodies and their cooperation with specialized agencies, United Nations funds and programmes and regional and non-governmental organizations

17. The chairpersons provided information on recent activities of the treaty bodies they represented. Brief statements were made by each chairperson in relation to the working methods, innovations made and challenges to be addressed by the respective committees.

18. Appreciation was expressed at the increasing cooperation between the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which has resulted in a joint paper on article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The chairpersons recommended that the expertise of the treaty bodies in general, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in particular, should be increasingly drawn upon by the Sub-Commission in its preparation of future studies on topics related to, *inter alia*, ethnic conflict, education and racial discrimination, globalization in the context of the increase in incidents of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, affirmative action, migrant workers and the rights of non-citizens.

19. The chairpersons emphasized the importance of the work of the special rapporteurs and representatives, experts and chairpersons of working groups and underlined the utility of and the need to have easy access to the reports of other existing United Nations mechanisms so as to improve the work of the human rights treaty bodies. It was recommended that ways to improve the communication and information flow between the various United Nations mechanisms be explored. The chairpersons further endorsed the conclusion reached at the fifth meeting of special rapporteurs that the current practice of special rapporteurs occasionally participating in meetings of treaty bodies should be institutionalized.

20. The chairpersons also noted with interest the wish expressed by the representative of UNESCO that the newly appointed Special Rapporteur on education should cooperate with UNESCO and be able to visit its headquarters to make use of its existing network and material.

21. The chairpersons further underlined the importance of the supportive work of and fruitful cooperation with a number of specialized agencies, United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations. It was once again regretted that no such constructive relationship had yet been established between the treaty bodies and some key agencies, in particular the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The chairpersons welcomed the statement of UNDP that it intended to increase its cooperation with the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as a first step towards greater involvement in the work of the treaty bodies as a whole.

22. The representative of UNDP informed the chairpersons of the ongoing cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in drafting a human rights programme, "Human rights strengthening – HURIST", with the aim of supporting the implementation of UNDP policy on human rights as presented in its policy document entitled "Integrating human rights with sustainable human development".

23. The chairpersons were briefed on the process under way, pursuant to the memorandum of understanding signed on 4 March 1998 by UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner, to draft a training module on human rights for UNDP staff at headquarters and field levels as part of the UNDP training programme. Still within the framework of the memorandum of understanding, the possibilities of staff exchange and rotations of Junior Professional Officers between UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner are being studied. The chairpersons very much hope that the strong commitment expressed in the memorandum of understanding will be translated into real action and support by UNDP at the national level.

24. The chairpersons noted with interest that, according to the memorandum of understanding, the recommendations of all special rapporteurs and the concluding observations of all treaty bodies should be sent to UNDP resident representatives, a decision endorsed by the chairpersons.

V. Universal ratification

25. Universal ratification has been a recurrent issue on the agenda of various treaty bodies and chairpersons' meetings. Commitments undertaken in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action towards universal ratification of the six principal human rights treaties must be given effect. In this framework, the chairpersons, at their ninth meeting, called upon the United Nations system as a whole to accord an even higher priority to efforts to encourage and facilitate ratification of each of the six treaties by every State.

26. The chairpersons reiterated their view that universal ratification of the six principal human rights treaties constituted an essential dimension of a global order committed to the full respect of human rights (see A/53/125, paras. 13–16).

27. The chairpersons noted that the memorandum of understanding referred to in paragraph 23 above includes in its annex, *inter alia*, a provision for cooperation with a view to promoting universal ratification of the international human rights instruments. In particular, it provides that UNDP shall, through its country offices, inform the Governments seeking assistance or advice on ratification of international human rights instruments about the availability of assistance under the technical cooperation programme of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

28. In view of the above, the chairpersons recommended that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights develop a concerted and comprehensive action programme to promote universal ratification in cooperation with specialized agencies and United Nations funds and programmes, in particular UNDP, and to report to the chairpersons at their eleventh meeting on the action taken in this regard.

VI. Improving the work of human rights treaty bodies

A. Focused and consolidated reports

29. At their eighth and ninth meetings, the chairpersons expressed the view that, in relation to periodic reports, there might be significant advantages in seeking ways by which to focus the report of each State party on a limited range of issues, which might be identified by the committees in advance of the preparation of the report. Such an approach would greatly reduce the need for very lengthy reports, minimize duplication of reports, help to eliminate long delays between the submission and the examination of reports, allow problem areas to be dealt with in depth and facilitate the follow-up of concluding observations, both for the State party and for the committee concerned. The chairpersons undertook to bring the issue to the attention of the members of their respective committees and to report on any measures that might be taken in that regard.

30. Following the discussion of recent experiences of the respective committees, the chairpersons reiterated their view that it was desirable to strive towards focused periodic reports, adding that account must be taken of the limited scope of the issues covered by some of the treaties.

31. With regard to the frequently expressed idea of consolidating reports in a single global report covering all six human rights treaties, no consensus could be reached. As at the eighth meeting, although the chairpersons considered that such an approach would reduce the number of different reports requested of States parties and would serve to underline the indivisibility of human rights by ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the situation, concerns were expressed in relation to problems resulting from the different periodicities of reporting under the treaties and, in particular, the risk that the special attention given to groups such as women and children would be lost in a single comprehensive report.

B. Venue of meetings

32. At the tenth meeting of chairpersons, the issue of interchangeability of venues was once more discussed. The chairpersons strongly emphasized that it would be desirable for the treaty bodies to meet in both Geneva and New York, as that would enhance the effectiveness and visibility of their work. They also believed that occasional sessions in New York would enable the four committees concerned to establish better contacts with States parties which did not have permanent missions at Geneva, to make their work much more widely known to a broader range of interested groups, to facilitate contacts with those non-governmental organizations and media representatives that were not active at Geneva and to provide an important opportunity for interaction with other international organizations which did not actively follow the work of the treaty bodies at Geneva. Similarly, the chairpersons reiterated the view that an opportunity for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to meet at Geneva would greatly enhance its relationship with other human rights mechanisms and give it access to a range of agencies, non-

governmental organizations and other groups not present in New York (A/52/507, para. 49).

33. Furthermore, the chairpersons noted the many advantages that would accrue if the treaty bodies were able to meet on an exceptional and occasional basis at the various United Nations regional offices. They requested the High Commissioner to approach the relevant offices to explore the conditions under which it might be possible to organize a treaty body session at the regional level without incurring costs significantly greater than those involved in meeting in New York or Geneva, as the case may be. The High Commissioner for Human Rights was requested to report to the chairpersons on the matter (A/52/507, para. 51).

34. Having been informed about the estimated financial implications of their proposal, the chairpersons reaffirmed their previous request. The chairpersons further underlined that the advantages and positive side-effects of holding meetings in both New York and Geneva, and occasionally in regional headquarters, by far outweighed the additional costs entailed.

C. Technical briefings for experts of human rights treaty bodies

35. At the eighth meeting of chairpersons, the Secretariat was requested to present a proposal as to the possible contents of technical briefings directed at treaty body members to expose them to the legal and institutional context in which the treaty bodies operate and to the work of the relevant international organizations.

36. Following the presentation of a proposal at their tenth meeting, the chairpersons welcomed the possibility of such technical briefings, especially as a means to familiarize new members with the workings of their committees. However, the chairpersons considered that the current proposal should be refined, bearing in mind, *inter alia*, that the briefings should be of a minimum of one day's duration, as well as procedures currently in place in the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The chairpersons recommended that the Secretariat amend its proposal accordingly.

D. Press coverage of the treaty bodies

37. At their tenth meeting, the chairpersons noted with interest the information received from the Information Service of the United Nations Office at Geneva on the ongoing information activities covering the work of all treaty bodies and measures planned to ensure better coverage of the meetings of treaty bodies, namely, (a) continuing work to make the activities of the committees better known, through radio communication with Geneva-based correspondents; (b) preparation, for November 1998, of an annual timetable for the six treaty bodies which would provide dates of meetings and list the State reports to be considered, so as to alert the press on the national level; and (c) continuing action to make television networks aware of the activities of the treaty bodies during public sessions.

38. It was noted that the United Nations press corps in New York and Geneva were heavily weighted in favour of Western countries. The chairpersons considered that this was particularly problematic insofar as it restricted the media coverage given to the examination of reports concerning other countries. They considered that the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Information Service offices at the country level should make a concerted effort to provide the local media with documentation and appropriate background briefings whenever a report from the State concerned or neighbouring States was being considered by any of the treaty bodies. They urged the Department to consider providing appropriate training to its field office representatives to enable them to perform this function effectively.

VII. Servicing of the human rights treaty bodies

A. Staffing situation

39. The chairpersons have on several previous occasions expressed their concern at the level of Secretariat assistance provided to the five Geneva-based committees. The chairpersons note that the new structure of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has not brought any improvement in the service for the human rights treaty bodies. The impact of the restructuring on their work has entailed a noticeable reduction of human resources assigned to the treaty bodies in terms of numbers of staff, as well as a loss of essential expertise and institutional memory.

40. The chairpersons expressed particular concern at the important turnover of staff servicing the human rights treaty bodies as a result of the restructuring, which has negatively affected the quality of the service received. In this context the chairpersons underlined the importance of appropriate

training of staff members in drafting methods and document research.

41. Having considered the information contained in the report of the Secretariat on universal ratification, improving the operation of the human rights treaty bodies, servicing of the treaty bodies and information technology,[1] concerning the relevant tasks performed and the time required to perform those tasks, the chairpersons reiterated their appeals already contained in the reports on their eighth and ninth meetings that the specialized secretariat staff servicing the committees be significantly strengthened. In view of the current financial situation of the United Nations as a whole, the possibility of seeking voluntary funds must be further explored, although adequate provision to human rights treaty bodies should be developed within the regular budget allocated to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

42. The chairpersons noted that while they had consistently called upon the High Commissioner to provide additional staff support, the High Commissioner had limited scope to respond as long as the States Members of the United Nations continued to reduce the already seriously inadequate resources available from the regular budget for human rights purposes. The failure of States to pay their longstanding arrears is particularly problematic in this respect and the honouring of financial obligations under the Charter of the United Nations could achieve a significant improvement of the situation. The chairpersons wished to highlight the fact that the reductions which had been made were inconsistent with the constant reaffirmations by States of the importance of the United Nations human rights mandate, and the dramatic expansion of tasks entrusted to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in general, particularly in relation to the treaty bodies.

43. Further, in view of the importance of finding concrete and innovative ways to improve the work of the human rights treaty bodies, the chairpersons emphasized the need for adequate resources to be made available to enable them to follow up and implement its various proposals.

B. Backlog of work

44. The chairpersons noted the growing backlog in the examination of reports of States parties and underlined the fact that it was detrimental to the proper functioning of the treaty bodies to press States parties to submit their reports in a timely fashion if those reports could not be examined before the data submitted became obsolete. While the chairpersons insisted that the examination of reports must not be rushed, and that the quality of the dialogue and of the concluding observations could be further improved, they recognized that it would be desirable to complete the examination of reports in fewer meetings than is currently the case. In order to achieve such an improvement, the chairpersons believe that better preparation of documents by the Secretariat would significantly assist the committees in examining State party reports more expeditiously.

45. The chairpersons noted that while the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination does not at present have any backlog of pending communications, the Committee against Torture is experiencing a constant growth in the number of communications received and is concerned that appropriate measures be taken to ensure that a serious backlog does not develop in the near future. With respect to the Human Rights Committee, the chairpersons remained concerned about the excessive number of pending cases and growing backlog of unanswered correspondence, which seriously calls into question the effectiveness of the Human Rights Committee and consequently of the Optional Protocol procedure.

46. The chairpersons suggested that some possibilities be explored to respond adequately to the current backlog of communications in the Human Rights Committee and to similar situations for other committees in the future. The chairpersons considered it the responsibility of each committee to persevere in the ongoing examination of working methods and to find adequate solutions. The chairpersons noted, as an example of measures already taken, that the Human Rights Committee had reviewed its methods of work and amended its rules of procedure to allow the joint examination of admissibility and merits in appropriate cases. This change had already enabled the Committee to reduce substantially the time required to complete the examination of communications.

47. Furthermore, in view of the present situation, the chairpersons wished once again to emphasize the fact that the individual communications procedures constituted an important part of the human rights treaties monitoring system. It was imperative that individual communications be acknowledged promptly upon receipt and processed expeditiously, although that might require a substantial increase in the number of specialized lawyers assigned to the work.

C. Plan of Action to strengthen the implementation of the international human rights treaties

48. The chairpersons welcomed the information received concerning the success of the Plan of Action to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been in operation since 1997 and has significantly helped the Committee on the Rights of the Child in carrying out its mandate. They also welcomed the information concerning the funds already received for the Plan of Action for the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

49. The chairpersons examined a proposed draft of a plan of action to strengthen the implementation of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention against Torture, prepared by the Secretariat pursuant to a recommendation contained in the report on the ninth meeting. The chairpersons confirmed the support expressed at their previous meetings for the adoption of such a plan of action, but requested the Secretariat to take due account of a number of concerns that needed to be addressed and to revise the proposal in close cooperation with the chairperson of the tenth meeting. They further requested the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure that the finalization and subsequent launching of a plan of action be given absolute priority so as to increase available resources.

VIII. Reservations to the human rights treaties

50. The chairpersons continued their discussion of the preliminary conclusions adopted by the International Law Commission at its forty-seventh session relating to reservations to normative multilateral treaties and noted the third report on reservations to treaties submitted by Mr. Alain Pellet, Special Rapporteur, to the Commission at its fiftieth session in 1998.

51. The chairpersons took note of the report of the Secretary-General reflecting the views of the six human rights treaty bodies on the preliminary conclusions of the International Law Commission,[4] paragraph 3 of which correctly reflects the position of the chairpersons:

> "At the ninth meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies, held at Geneva in February 1998, the chairpersons considered the Commission's Preliminary Conclusions and drew attention to the emphasis attached in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action to the importance of limiting the number and the extent of reservations to human rights treaties and welcomed the recognition contained in the text that treaty monitoring bodies have an important competence in relation to reservations. They considered, however, that the Preliminary Conclusions were unduly restrictive in other respects and did not accord sufficient attention to the fact that human rights treaties, by virtue of their subject matter and the role they recognize to individuals, cannot be placed on precisely the same footing as other treaties with different characteristics."

52. The chairpersons agreed to pursue the consideration of the preliminary conclusions in their respective committees with a view to formulating their comments and forwarding them to the International Law Commission as soon as possible.

IX. Gender perspectives in the work of the treaty bodies

53. At their eighth meeting, the chairpersons invited the Division for the Advancement of Women to prepare a background paper analysing what the various treaty bodies had done, and should do, in integrating a gender perspective into their work. At their tenth meeting, the chairpersons were presented with a report reviewing the integration of a gender perspective into the work of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies. The chairpersons strongly endorsed the report and emphasized the usefulness of such a comprehensive study to the work of the treaty bodies, in particular in assessing current practices and in identifying and focusing on areas of improvements for the future. The chairpersons however expressed concern at the risk that this valuable analysis might not receive the attention deserved, and called upon each of the committees to take full account of the recommendations contained in the report within the framework of their respective mandates.

54. The chairpersons further noted with interest the proposed guidelines on gender perspective presented by the International Women's Rights Action Watch, which could prove to be an indispensable tool in integrating the gender perspective into the work of the treaty bodies in practice.

X. Conclusions and recommendations

55. The chairpersons expressed strong concern at the geographical and gender imbalances reflected in the composition of certain of the treaty bodies. In particular, they noted that the number of African experts within two of the committees was entirely unsatisfactory. They recognized that the election of members of the treaty bodies was entirely a matter for the States parties. Nevertheless they called upon States parties to make a concerted effort to remedy the imbalances.

56. In view of the recent successful outcome of cooperation between the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, the chairpersons recommended that the expertise of the treaty bodies in general, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in particular, should be increasingly drawn upon by the Sub-Commission in its preparation of future studies on topics related to, *inter alia*, ethnic conflict, education and racial discrimination, globalization in the context of the increase in incidents of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, affirmative action, migrant workers and the rights of non-citizens.

57. Underlining the importance of the work of the special rapporteurs and representatives, experts and chairpersons of working groups, the chairpersons recommended that effective ways to improve the communication and information flow between the various United Nations mechanisms be explored. They further endorsed the conclusion reached at the fifth meeting of special rapporteurs that the current practice of special rapporteurs occasionally participating in meetings of treaty bodies should be institutionalized.

58. The chairpersons recommended that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights develop a concerted and comprehensive action programme to promote universal ratification in cooperation with specialized agencies, and United Nations funds and programmes, in particular UNDP, and to report to the chairpersons at their eleventh meeting on the action taken in this regard.

59. The chairpersons also noted with interest the wish expressed by the representative of UNESCO that the newly appointed Special Rapporteur on education should cooperate with UNESCO and be able to visit its headquarters to make use of its existing network and material.

60. The chairpersons very much hope that the strong commitment expressed in the memorandum of understanding signed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNDP will be translated into real action and support by UNDP at the national level. The chairpersons noted with interest that, according to the memorandum of understanding, the recommendations of all special rapporteurs and the concluding observations of all treaty bodies should be sent to UNDP resident representatives, a decision endorsed by the chairpersons.

61. For the reasons cited above (paras. 32–34), the chairpersons reiterated their request that necessary steps be taken to enable the four human rights treaty bodies meeting only at Geneva to hold occasional sessions in New York, and for the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to hold sessions at Geneva. They also reiterated their request to be enabled to meet, on occasion, at other United Nations regional offices.

62. The chairpersons recommended that a programme of technical briefings for committee experts be developed on the basis of the proposal presented by the Secretariat during the tenth meeting, incorporating elements suggested by the chairpersons.

63. The chairpersons recommended that the Secretariat, in conjunction with the Information Service of the United Nations Office at Geneva, explore ways to attract the interest of the media worldwide, through increased cooperation with national information offices. They also considered that the Department and the United Nations Information Service offices at the country level should make a concerted effort to provide the local media with documentation and appropriate background briefings whenever a report from the State concerned, or neighbouring States, was being considered by any of the treaty bodies. The chairpersons urged the Department to consider providing appropriate training to its field office representatives to enable them to perform this function effectively.

64. The chairpersons noted that while they had consistently called upon the High Commissioner to provide additional staff support, the High Commissioner had limited scope to respond as long as Member States continued to reduce the already seriously inadequate resources available from the regular budget for human rights purposes. The failure of States to pay their longstanding arrears is particularly problematic in this respect and the honouring of financial obligations under the Charter could achieve a significant improvement of the situation. The chairpersons wished to highlight the fact that the reductions which had been made were inconsistent with the constant reaffirmations by States of the importance of the United Nations human rights mandate, and the dramatic expansion of tasks

entrusted to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in general, particularly in relation to the treaty bodies.

65. In view of the importance of finding concrete and innovative ways to improve the work of the human rights treaty bodies, the chairpersons wished to emphasize the need for adequate attention and resources to follow up and implement its various proposals.

66. So as to respond adequately to the current backlog of communications in the Human Rights Committee and to similar situations for other committees in the future, the chairpersons recommended all committees to persevere in their ongoing examination of working methods and to find adequate solutions to current difficulties and challenges ahead. The chairpersons suggested that the following possibilities might be explored: (a) an additional week to deal solely with individual communications; (b) an increase in the number of members of the committees, a suggestion which however should be seen as a long-term project as it would entail amendments of existing treaties and a subsequent ratification process; and (c) the creation of small working groups.

67. The chairpersons strongly endorsed the proposed plan of action to strengthen the implementation of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention against Torture and Other Forms of Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and requested the Secretariat to take account of a number of concerns that needed to be addressed and to revise the proposal presented in close cooperation with the chairperson of the tenth meeting. They further requested the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure that the finalization and subsequent launching of a plan of action be given absolute priority and that necessary resources be made available.

68. The chairpersons called upon each of the committees to take full account of the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the question of integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system,[5] within the framework of their respective mandates.

69. The chairpersons considered that informal consultations with States parties during the tenth meeting were extremely useful, and requested the Secretariat to arrange for the holding of an informal consultation during their eleventh meeting.

Notes

[1] HRI/MC/1998/4.

[2] HRI/MC/1998/5.

[3] HRI/MC/1998/6.

[4] E/CN.4/Sub.2/1998/25.

[5] E/CN.4/1998/49.

United Nations A/53/433

General Assembly

Distr.: General
24 September 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session
Agenda item 110 (c)
Human rights questions: human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives

Situation of human rights in Iraq

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the interim report on the situation of human rights in Iraq prepared by Max van der Stoel, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1998/263 of 30 July 1998.

98-28289 (E) 161098

Annex

Report on the situation of human rights in Iraq prepared by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1998/263 of 30 July 1998

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I. Introduction

1. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Iraq has been described in each of the Special Rapporteur's previous reports to the General Assembly and to the Commission on Human Rights. The mandate, initially articulated in Commission resolution 1991/74 of 6 March 1991 and extended most recently by the Commission in resolution 1998/65 of 21 April 1998 (approved by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1998/263 of 30 July 1998), requires the Special Rapporteur to make a thorough study of the violations of human rights by the Government of Iraq.

2. The priority concerns of the international community with regard to the situation of human rights in Iraq are referred to in the resolutions which the various competent organs of the United Nations have adopted over the past seven years, in particular General Assembly resolution 52/141 of 12 December 1997 and Commission resolution 1998/65 of 21 April 1998, which are the most recent.

3. The Commission on Human Rights noted in its most recent resolution that there has been no improvement in the situation of human rights in the country and strongly condemned the massive and extremely grave violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law by the Government of Iraq, which constitute together an all-pervasive repression and oppression sustained by broad-based discrimination and widespread terror; the suppression of freedom of thought, expression, religion, information, association, assembly and movement through fear of arrest, imprisonment and other sanctions, including the death penalty; summary and arbitrary executions, including political killings, enforced or involuntary disappearances, routinely practised arbitrary arrests and detention and consistent and routine failure to respect due process and the rule of law; widespread, systematic torture in its most cruel forms, and the enactment and implementation of decrees prescribing cruel and inhuman punishment, namely mutilation, as a penalty for offences and diversion of medical care services for such mutilations.

4. In the absence of cooperation on the part of the Government, the Special Rapporteur has continued to rely on information from governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental sources. He has also received well-documented information from individuals connected in one way or another with the situation in Iraq. He has further received several well-documented reports describing the situation in Iraq, particularly in relation to the matters over which the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights have expressed serious concern. No less importantly, he has had direct contact with Iraqis who have fled the country and from whom he continues to receive information.

5. The present interim report is based upon information received by the Special Rapporteur up to 31 August 1998 and is to be read in conjunction with the Special Rapporteur's last report to the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/1998/67).

II. Civil and political rights

6. Since the politico-legal structure of the Republic of Iraq has not changed in the past year, human rights continue to be violated systematically in Iraq. Not surprisingly, allegations relating to arbitrary arrests, mistreatment in detention, cruel and unusual punishments and arbitrary and extrajudicial executions continue to be received.

A. Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

7. The Special Rapporteur has already reported upon the so-called "prison cleansing campaign" in his last reports to the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights. He continues to receive reports referring to an execution campaign taking place in Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad. Supporting the allegations, several lists of names of more than 170 detainees executed between mid-December 1997 and July 1998 have been made available to the Special Rapporteur.

8. With regard to the charges which have led to the death penalty, these executions are said to have involved detainees charged with participating in "mob incidents". This accusation is alleged to cover up the politically motivated intention to punish those persons who took part in the popular uprisings of March 1991 characterized by the Government of Iraq as "mob incidents". It is to be mentioned that some of the persons who took part in these events are currently serving sentences ranging from 10 to 15 years in Abu Ghraib prison.

9. The names of some of the victims have been mentioned in official orders reportedly issued by the Secretary of the Presidential Office, dated 24 March 1998, addressed to the Public Security Directorate demanding "the necessary instructions regarding the crime of those executed for destabilizing State security and threatening national security,

and withdraw[ing] their military ranks and the medals awarded to them". The victims come from the governorates of Ta'mim, Basra, Kerbala, Misan, Babel, Dhe Qar, Qadisiyyah, Najaf and Muthanna.

10. Concerning the last list received which refers to 62 detainees said to have been executed in late June 1998, the sources report that the victims originated from governorates throughout Iraq. However, they were all charged with participating in "mob incidents" in 1991. Most of the victims had been detained for several years, in particular in Mosul detention centre, before their sentences were carried out. The information received further reveals that the victims had been transferred to death cells in Abu Ghraib prison about three months before the executions. As a result, their state of health was reportedly very poor. The sources also report that after the executions the bodies of the victims were transported to Al-Kindi hospital for post-mortem.

11. It is further reported that the above-noted executions were carried out either by hanging or shooting. According to certain sources, the authorities did not return the bodies of the victims to the families, but buried the corpses in mass graves in Abu Ghraib district. Other sources report that the bodies were returned, but the families had to pay for the bullet used to kill the victim in order to recover the bodies of their relatives. In these last cases, the families were reportedly not allowed to hold burials and mourning ceremonies.

12. In his last report to the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/1998/67), the Special Rapporteur reported on the case of four Jordanians executed on 8 December 1997 for having smuggled $850 worth of car parts. Subsequently, on 12 December 1997, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions sent a letter to the Government of Iraq requesting information concerning the aforementioned executions. On 30 March 1998, the Government of Iraq replied to the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions stating that the four Jordanians had been duly tried in accordance with the laws in force at the time of the commission of the offence, in conformity with article 182 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. They had been sentenced to death in accordance with article 194 of Customs Act No. 23 of 1984, as amended by Revolution Command Council Decree No. 67 of 1994, pursuant to articles 47, 48 and 49 of the Penal Code and article 11 of the Trade Regulatory Act, on charges of smuggling spare parts, material, heavy equipment and machinery after it had been dismantled. The reply further stated that this offence is highly detrimental to the country's economic infrastructure and to the public interest, being equivalent to deliberate economic sabotage in time of siege and war.

13. The Special Rapporteur observes, as he has in the past, that execution for commission of petty property crimes – involving no violence whatsoever – is a wholly disproportionate punishment constituting violation of the right to life. Moreover, the Special Rapporteur considers that maintenance by the Government of Iraq of such severe penalties for such a wide variety of offences is indicative of the nature of the overall situation of human rights in Iraq, as evidenced also in the general attitude of the authorities in defending as normal the imposition of the death penalty for such petty offences.

14. Since taking up his mandate in the summer of 1991, the Special Rapporteur has also received detailed information concerning what he has called "political killings". In previous reports, this phrase has been used to describe pre-planned killings of individuals carried out by government agents upon orders, from the murder of village mayors to Ministers of State and from High Street assassinations to elaborate extraterritorial assassinations and thallium poisonings. This year again, the Special Rapporteur finds himself having to condemn recent assassinations, specifically those of two internationally respected religious scholars residing in Najaf: Grand Ayatollah Shaykh Mirza Ali al-Gharawi and Ayatollah Shaykh Murtada al-Burujerdi. By a statement issued on 2 July 1998 (HR/98/45), the Special Rapporteur expressed his concern that these deaths may be part of an organized attack by Iraqi officials against the independent leadership of the Shi'a religious community in Iraq. Such attacks are consistent with previous assaults against the Shi'a religious establishment in Iraq, especially since the uprisings of March–April 1991.

15. According to information received, Grand Ayatollah Shaykh Mirza Ali al-Gharawi (68 years old) was assassinated on 18 June 1998 in his car on the route between the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf. He was accompanied by his son-in-law, driver and another companion. According to information from persons claiming to have been witnesses, the car of Ayatollah al-Gharawi was stopped and all four passengers were shot dead on the spot.

16. Ayatollah al-Gharawi was a well-respected religious scholar and was also a senior spiritual leader (or *marja*) of Shi'a Muslims. The Iraqi Government is reported to favour another scholar whom many clerics feel is unqualified. Just one month prior to his assassination, it was reported that Ayatollah al-Gharawi had been harassed and warned by the Iraqi authorities to cease leading prayers, despite the fact that Ayatollah al-Gharawi had never been involved in

political activity. The Iraqi Government has denied any involvement in the attack, calling the murders "a treacherous crime behind which stand malicious foreign-based elements".

17. The assassination of Ayatollah al-Gharawi follows the recent assassination of Ayatollah Shaykh Murtada al-Burujerdi (67 years old), another leading religious scholar and jurist residing in the holy city of Najaf, who was shot dead in the evening of 21 April 1998 while he was walking home with two companions after he had led congregational evening prayers at the shrine of Imam Ali. Reliable sources claim that Ayatollah al-Burujerdi had suffered various forms of harassment by Iraqi officials in the two years prior to his death. In particular, the Ayatollah had previously survived two serious attacks. In the first (two years ago), he was severely beaten and in the second (a little over a year ago), a hand grenade was thrown at him causing injuries to his legs which forced him to remain at home for two months.

18. Following the 1991 uprising in southern Iraq, Ayatollah al-Burujerdi, who at that time had been arrested for three days, began leading the daily prayers in the sacred enclosure of Imam Ali. As well as being a leader of the congregational prayers, Ayatollah al-Burujerdi was a serious candidate for the position of *marja*. It was reported that Ayatollah al-Burujerdi had been asked by the Iraqi authorities to give up his post as leader of the prayers at the shrine of Imam Ali, but he refused. Two months prior to his death, Ayatollah al-Burujerdi was reportedly visited by Iraqi officials who ordered him to stop leading the prayers, but he said he would only agree to do so if he received an order in writing from the Government. He was apparently opposed to the Iraqi Government's interference with the religious community, including the Government's support for another cleric.

19. The Special Rapporteur fears that these murders are part of a systematic attack on the independent leadership of Shi'a Muslims in Iraq. The Special Rapporteur notes that Grand Ayatollah Sayed Ali Seestani (the current Shi'a Islamic spiritual leader who succeeded Grand Ayatollah Sayed al-Khoei who died under house arrest in 1992) was attacked at his home in Najaf in November 1996, resulting in the death of one of his employees. Grand Ayatollah Seestani was effectively harassed into stopping his prayers at the al-Khadra mosque. The Special Rapporteur also recalls that governmental authorities have been associated with a series of previous fatal accidents, apparently engineered, such as the well-known case of Sayed Muhammed Taqi al-Khoei (son of the late Grand Ayatollah al-Khoei) who died on 21 July 1994 in a suspicious car accident while returning from his weekly visit to Karbala. He was accompanied by his brother-in-law, Amin Khalkhali, his six-year-old nephew and his driver when they crashed into an unlit truck blocking the divided highway on flat ground at around 11 p.m. His driver and nephew died instantly. Mr. Al-Khoei and his brother-in-law were not taken to the hospital immediately and bled to death on the side of the road. An ambulance arrived only around 4 a.m. to pick up the bodies. As with Ayatollah al-Burujerdi and Ayatollah al-Gharawi, Muhammad Taqi al-Khoei had previously been harassed by Iraqi security agents and had received threats aimed to stop his independent activities within the Shi'a religious community.

20. In each of the cases of Ayatollah al-Gharawi, Ayatollah al-Burujerdi and Sayed al-Khoei, the Iraqi authorities took the bodies and had them buried immediately. The burial of Ayatollah al-Gharawi was in the presence of his son who was prohibited from engaging in any funeral procession as well as from the traditional ritual prayer over his father's body in a mosque. The Iraqi authorities have also failed to carry out thorough investigations into the murders and suspicious accident.

21. The Special Rapporteur believes that the deaths of the religious leaders described above must be viewed in the context of the previous threats against them, their special roles as leading members of the Shi'a religious establishment in Iraq, and the history of similar terrorist acts committed against any person who might be perceived as a threat to the Iraqi Government – in particular because of their independence or their popularity among ordinary Iraqis.

22. As reprehensible as they are as violations of the individual victims' right to life, such killings are most notable because of their apparent intent to violate, by means of terror, the freedoms of opinion and expression of particular groups or the population as a whole. Although the cases concern the killing of particular persons, the aim of the killings appears to be a political one with the objective of silencing dissent and suppressing opposition. Such political killings constitute a gross violation of the human rights of entire groups of people and, indeed, of the population as a whole.

23. Faced with the gravity of the situation, the Special Rapporteur sent a letter to the Government of Iraq on 1 July 1998 in which he requested that the Iraqi authorities carefully investigate both cases so as to clearly identify those responsible. With respect to the remaining Shi'a religious establishment in Iraq, the Special Rapporteur further called upon the Government of Iraq to ensure their personal integrity and freedoms.

B. Arbitrary detention and conditions of detention

24. The Special Rapporteur has also continued to receive reports of widespread arbitrary arrest and detention. Some of these concern the arbitrary arrest several years ago of persons who continue in detention, while others concern recent arrests and detention.

25. The Special Rapporteur has received information on the arrest in July 1998 of Mr. Dawoud Al-Farhan, a senior journalist and reporter for the Middle-East News Agency and a columnist for the daily *Al-Iraq* and the weekly *Al-Mousawar Al-Arabi*. Mr. Al-Farhan was arrested at his office in Baghdad and taken to the Ministry of Information. It is further believed that his arrest might be related to recent articles he had written reporting on corruption and embezzlement by Iraqi government officials. All efforts made by his family to locate him have been to no avail and his fate remains unknown.

26. The Special Rapporteur has also received three lists of detainees whose cases were processed by the Public Security Directorate of Ta'mim (Kirkuk) in 1998. In addition to the name, ethnic origin and the governorate of each detainee, the list also provides the charges for which they were arrested and subsequently detained.

27. The first list refers to political cases and contains the names of 42 detainees who have been arrested and charged with "spying" or "belonging to the opposition". The charge of spying is not meant on behalf of a foreign State, but is employed by the Government of Iraq also for members of political opponents inside the country. Indeed, the first part of the list names 32 persons of either Arab, Kurdish or Turcoman origin who have been arrested for spying or belonging to the opposition. These detainees have been transferred to the Security General Directorate after inquiry and questioning in early April 1998. The second part of the list refers to 10 other persons of Kurdish origin charged with supporting the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan who have been detained since April 1998.

28. The second and third lists, which contain 41 and 89 names, respectively, cite the charges for which the detainees were arrested. The charges are numerous and range from criticizing the Government to smuggling food items, stealing, forging documents (passports), fleeing the country or fleeing to northern Iraq. However, the sources report that the authorities often resort to charging detainees with petty crimes, burglary, smuggling or even murder in order to conceal the real reason for arrest and detention.

29. On the subject of disappearances, it is to be noted that the Special Rapporteur received a report revealing that hundreds of Fayli Kurds and other Iraqi citizens of Iranian origin who had disappeared in the early 1980s were in fact being held incommunicado in Abu Ghraib prison. According to this report, these persons have been detained in extremely harsh conditions without specific charges or trial for periods of 17 and 18 years. Families of the detainees (women, children and the elderly) had been forced to leave their homes and cross the border into Iranian territory in 1980.

C. Cruel and unusual treatment and punishment

30. It has been part and parcel of most of the allegations received by the Special Rapporteur concerning detention that persons arrested and detained are routinely subjected to mistreatment, including prolonged inquisitions accompanied by beating and various deprivations, not to mention torture.

31. The Special Rapporteur has expressed for some years his extreme concern about especially cruel and unusual punishments prescribed by Iraqi law, i.e. mutilations including amputations and brandings. While the Government of Iraq has argued in the last year or two that these punishments have not been imposed, the Special Rapporteur has observed that the Government's failure to abrogate the punishments from prescribed law constitutes a continuing gross violation of human rights insofar as the prescriptions function to terrorize the population and may well be reimposed should the Government suddenly withdraw its suspension of their implementation.

32. In connection with the above-mentioned cruel and unusual punishments, the Special Rapporteur has received a report indicating that penal amputations were reimposed in August 1998. According to information received, in a letter dated 7 August 1998, Uday Hussain, the son of President Saddam Hussein, ordered that six members of an elite commando unit who used their position to rob people be punished by having a hand amputated. An army deserter also involved in the alleged banditry was ordered to be punished in a similar way. This report is notable for at least three reasons: (a) it indicates that penal amputations are being imposed in Iraq; (b) it indicates that such punishments are being imposed without due process of law; and (c) it indicates that there is effectively no rule of law in Iraq insofar as Uday Hussein holds no judicial or similar competence and is merely the publisher of a daily newspaper and the head of the Iraqi Olympic Committee.

III. The rights to food and health care

33. The Special Rapporteur has consistently reported on the food and health situation in Iraq since he took up his mandate in 1991. The Special Rapporteur observes that along with the systematic violation of various civil and political rights, the Government of Iraq has consistently failed to respect its obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to the detriment of the welfare of millions of Iraqi citizens. In particular, notwithstanding its own calculations of widespread suffering and high morbidity and mortality rates throughout the country (especially affecting women, children and the elderly), the Government of Iraq has persistently failed to act to the maximum of its available resources and in full cooperation with the international community to respect and ensure the rights to food and health care, according to article 2 of the Covenant in conjunction with articles 11 and 12.

34. The Government of Iraq refused for five years to cooperate with the United Nations and take advantage of the so-called "oil-for-food" resolutions which would have long ago provided substantially increased resources to assist specially affected persons. At the same time, it failed to ensure the end of the sanctions – and consequently also the end for the need for "oil-for-food" programmes – by complying with relevant Security Council resolutions. When the Government of Iraq finally did begin to cooperate with the United Nations on the implementation of an "oil-for-food" programme, it nonetheless prevaricated in negotiations, restricted the access and flexibility of the United Nations in carrying out the operations and subsequently interrupted oil sales at various times and for significant durations, all of which has been to the detriment of the long-suffering Iraqi people, in particular the most vulnerable.

35. Greater supplies of food and medicine and more material for the improvement of the sanitation system would have reached Iraq if the Government would have given priority to these items in allocating resources for imports. But instead it gave priority to its military programmes and to the building of prestige objects such as numerous palaces for which material had to be imported from abroad.

36. It is to be noted that the "oil-for-food" programme was substantially increased as a result of Security Council resolution 1153 (1998) of 20 February 1998 which more than doubled the allowable sales of oil to some US$ 5.2 billion every six months. In his report of 5 June 1998 (S/1998/477), the Secretary-General noted that the implementation of the "oil-for-food" programme was improving as a result of the efforts made by all parties involved. Indeed, the Office of the Iraq Programme and the Security Council Committee had taken measures so as to improve the expeditious processing and approval of applications under phase III. The Government of Iraq had also reportedly improved contractual arrangements with its suppliers, in particular by setting delivery time-limits in the contracts. These efforts have led to a general increase in the range and volume of humanitarian supplies reaching Iraq. As a result, the distribution of the ration basket was made more complete and medicines and health supplies were reported to arrive with increasing frequency.

37. Nevertheless, these efforts had been offset by a substantial drop in oil prices and delays by the Government of Iraq in the resumption of oil sales, so that at times there have been more than 200 applications approved, but letters of approval could not be released because of lack of funding. Therefore, arrivals of supplies continued to be erratic resulting in missing, delayed or reduced items, the greatest impact being felt in the food and health sectors. Medical contracts remained unfunded until the latter part of the phase.

38. Notwithstanding improvements in the efficiency of the programme, as reported by the Secretary-General, the humanitarian situation remains precarious. Indeed, United Nations observers report that only once in March 1998 did the food basket contain the full ration for all commodities other than infant formula. They also report that for more than half of the households checked, depending on the commodity, the ration lasts for an average of 20 days. As for the beneficiaries, they continue to complain about the inadequacy of the food basket.

39. With regard to the nutritional situation of children under the age of five, the Ministry of Health, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Food Programme conducted in March 1998 a nutritional status survey the preliminary results of which indicate that the situation remains unchanged since the previous survey in March 1997. It is reported that 27 per cent of children are suffering from chronic malnutrition while 9 per cent are suffering from acute malnutrition. The Special Rapporteur is deeply concerned by the persistence of this suffering and its implications for Iraqi society.

40. Until 14 May 1998, Iraqi citizens who had moved from the three northern governorates of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah to new domiciles in the 15 governorates in the centre and south were not eligible to receive the ration provided under Security Council resolution 986 (1995).

Since 14 May 1998, the aforementioned citizens are reportedly eligible to receive the food ration. However, the Special Rapporteur believes that the established registration procedure is discriminatory as these citizens in order to receive their rations must prove that they have resided in the new location for at least six months. Therefore, a family who decides to move from the three northern governorates to a governorate in the centre or the south will not be able to receive its food ration for six months. The Special Rapporteur believes that such a regime is contrary to the humanitarian spirit of the ration system which is supposed to be based simply on need.

41. Health centres located in remote areas do not receive or collect supplies on a regular basis and are usually one month behind distribution elsewhere. Furthermore, because they are not staffed by doctors, they do not receive special drugs and supplies needed in emergency cases such as road traffic accidents. The Special Rapporteur is concerned that remote areas are neglected and suffer discrimination with regard to supplies of certain drugs.

42. Since the first distribution of supplies to private sector pharmacies in August 1997, the allocation of general drugs has been based on a defined quota according to population density and the number of pharmacies. In January 1998, the allocation criteria were restricted to the number of pharmacies. This has led to an increase in the proportion of supplies allocated to Baghdad. Whereas hitherto private pharmacies in Baghdad had received 32.9 per cent of supplies for approximately 29 per cent of the Iraqi population, this has now increased to 40 per cent. The Special Rapporteur is concerned that this practice is discriminatory towards the population who live outside Baghdad with regard to their right to health care.

43. Insofar as the "oil-for-food" programme has been implemented in a discriminatory and not fully equitable or efficient manner, the Special Rapporteur observes that the Government of Iraq is solely responsible for the distribution programme. By determination of the Government of Iraq, the role of the United Nations is only to observe with a view to ensuring the equitable distribution of supplies received under the programme. In this respect, however, United Nations observers are seriously constrained by restrictions imposed by the Government of Iraq, including the following: (a) observers are always escorted by governmental representatives; (b) observers must notify and inform governmental officials about their schedules well in advance; and (c) observers are strictly limited in what they may ask citizens in the course of their "observations". In these circumstances, it is difficult to state that the monitoring is being performed in an independent and unprejudiced manner. Moreover, given the security situation, many sensitive areas are rarely, if ever, visited.

44. In terms of the overall efficiency of the "oil-for-food" programme, the Special Rapporteur also observes that the resistance of the Government of Iraq to the establishment of an "ongoing" programme, as recommended by the United Nations, further undermines the effectiveness of the programme to the detriment of the intended beneficiaries. The Special Rapporteur finds disingenuous the argument of the Government of Iraq that such an "ongoing" programme would be contrary to the spirit of the Security Council regime (which is intended to be temporary) since it is wholly within the power of the Government of Iraq to end this regime by complying with all Security Council resolutions. In the meantime, to plan the programme on an "ongoing" basis would add significantly to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the "oil-for-food" programme, exactly in line with the humanitarian spirit of this programme.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

45. The Special Rapporteur regrets that he is yet again unable to report any significant improvement in the situation of human rights in Iraq. Principally, there has been no change whatsoever in the politico-legal order which is the cause of systematic violations of human rights of all kinds and in all spheres of life. This is most apparent in the reported case of Uday Hussein's unilateral (and wholly unlawful) reimposition of amputations, which follows the refusal of the Government of Iraq to abrogate these heinous punishments.

46. The Special Rapporteur also concludes that the continuing attacks against the Shi'a religious establishment, in particular through the recent assassinations of religious leaders, constitutes systematic oppression in the form of an intended terror. This follows along the same evident intention of the Government of Iraq to punish all those who were in any way implicated in the uprisings of 1991.

47. With regard to the rights to food and health care, the Special Rapporteur regrets that the situation remains precarious notwithstanding the availability of significant resources pursuant to the enlarged "oil-for-food" programme. In this respect, the Government of Iraq bears primary responsibility for the continuing suffering of the Iraqi people.

48. In view of the above, all previous recommendations of the Special Rapporteur remain valid. Indeed, it would appear that so far not one of the Special Rapporteur's

recommendations has been implemented, with the exception of his recommendation to implement the "oil-for-food" programme – and this the Government of Iraq resists doing fully.

United Nations A/53/434

General Assembly

Distr.: General
25 September 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session
Agenda item 27
Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States

Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraphs 9 and 10 of General Assembly resolution 52/5 of 22 October 1997.

II. Consultations and exchanges of information

2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States (LAS) continued their practice of meetings and consultations. During the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, the two Secretaries-General discussed the situation regarding the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Iraq and Algeria, as well as United Nations reform. During his visit to the Middle East in March 1997, the Secretary-General, while at Cairo, called on Mr. Esmat Abdel Maguid. The situation as regards Iraq, Somalia, the Comoros, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the Lockerbie case, as well as the Middle East peace process, were among the topics addressed.

3. The Secretary-General convened a third high-level meeting between the United Nations and regional organizations at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 28 and 29 July 1998. The theme of the meeting was "Cooperation for conflict prevention". LAS was represented at that meeting by its Assistant Secretary-General for Political and International Affairs, Dr. Mohamed Zakaria Ismai.

4. The secretariats of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, as well as the Office of the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, have continued to maintain close contacts on matters of mutual concern to the two organizations.

5. A high-level LAS delegation visited the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in March 1998 and exchanged views on UNCTAD activities related to the Arab world, particularly on trade information, debt management, international trade issues and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Intensive consultations between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and LAS were conducted at the level of the Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States in UNDP and the Secretary-General of the League, as well as at the technical level. High-level contacts between the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and LAS included a meeting between the Deputy Commissioner-General of UNRWA and representatives of LAS host authorities at Cairo in July 1997; a meeting between the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and representatives of the LAS host authorities at Amman in September 1997; and a meeting between the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and the Secretary-General of LAS at Cairo in September 1997. In early 1998, a high-level team from the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) visited the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to discuss co-financing opportunities.

III. Follow-up action on proposals agreed to at general meetings between the United Nations system and the League of Arab States

6. A summary of the reports of the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system on their cooperation with the League of Arab States during the period under review is given below. It represents the follow-up action on proposals adopted at the United Nations-LAS meetings at Vienna in 1995 (A/50/496) and Geneva in 1997 (A/52/378).

A. United Nations Secretariat

1. Department of Public Information

7. The Radio and Central News Service produced three feature programmes in Arabic devoted exclusively to the position of the League of Arab States during the fifty-second session of the General Assembly and the international gatherings in support of the Palestinian people. Other radio news bulletins, current affairs and regional magazines dealt with various aspects of the work and activities of LAS, including the following: interviews with the LAS Secretary-General; two interviews with the Permanent Observer of LAS to the United Nations; coverage of the nineteenth ministerial session of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held at Beirut; and coverage of a special meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to observe the thirtieth anniversary of the occupation by Israel of the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories. United Nations Radio/Geneva interviewed Mr. Said Kemal, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, during an international non-governmental organization seminar on the question of Palestine held at Geneva.

8. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has intensified cooperation with the Documentation and Information Centre of the League of Arab States in Cairo, ensuring that the Centre regularly receives United Nations materials.

2. Department of Economic and Social Affairs

9. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, with the support of UNDP, has continued to execute a project on Administrative Development of the general secretariat of LAS. The project is aimed at strengthening the administration of LAS and modernizing its work procedures. More specifically, the project is expected to contribute to: the development of the organizational structure of the departments and units of the general secretariat; the development and application of work methods and procedures; the streamlining of the processing, storage and retrieval of data through assistance in the development, and installation and application of a management information system.

10. An independent evaluation team assessed the first phase of the project in November 1997. Negotiations between LAS, UNDP and the Department are under way to start a second phase of the project so that the recommendations and findings of the evaluation report can be implemented.

11. The Department has also been carrying out research and analysis in such areas of mutual interest as the advancement of women, youth matters, eradication of poverty, population and statistics. Substantive reports, analyses and other relevant material are available for exchange on a reciprocal basis.

B. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

12. Collaboration continued with LAS, its specialized agencies and affiliated bodies within the context of the ESCWA programme of work, mainly through the preparation of reports and reciprocal participation in meetings and follow-up to global conferences. Specific examples of these activities are given below.

13. In 1998, collaborative efforts between ESCWA and LAS in terms of follow-up to global conferences have continued. The two organizations are co-sponsoring four regional preparatory meetings for the Arab conference on integrated follow-up to global conferences, scheduled for the biennium 1998–1999, namely, follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development; the World Summit for Social Development; the Fourth World Conference on Women; and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

14. Cooperation with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) was undertaken in the framework of ESCWA activities in community development, human development and poverty eradication. In addition, ESCWA attended the Second Symposium on Water Resources in the Arab World, organized by AFESD and the Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD) (Kuwait, 8–10 March 1997), and presented a paper on the subject.

15. ESCWA participated in the regional seminar on current and future prospects of urban food distribution systems in the Near East region (Beirut, 11–15 August 1997), where it presented a case study on urban food marketing in greater Amman. ESCWA cooperated with the Arab Labour Organization (ALO) to formulate strategies for sustainable human development in the Arab world. ESCWA and the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) co-sponsored a workshop on the theme "Implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts" (Abu Dhabi, 7–17 June 1997).

16. ESCWA and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) have held annual coordination meetings to exchange views and identify activities of mutual interest. AOAD participated in the first session of the ESCWA Committee on Water Resources (Amman, 30 and 31 March 1997); and in an expert group meeting on water legislation (Amman, 24–26 November 1996). ESCWA also contributed to two training workshops organized by AOAD by delivering two lectures at a national training workshop on strengthening the role of women's organizations in rural development (Amman, May 1997) and a regional training workshop on the implementation and management of agricultural projects (Amman, July 1997).

17. ESCWA delivered four lectures at a workshop on groundwater protection in the Arab world organized by ACSAD and held at Amman from 6 to 10 December 1997. ESCWA and the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO) are cooperating in developing a network, AIDMO-TIES, for the transfer of technology. Moreover, ESCWA collaborated with AIDMO to issue a joint publication entitled "Bulletin of industrial statistics in the Arab countries".

C. United Nations Children's Fund

18. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the League of Arab States' Department of Childhood continued to work together very closely on issues of common concern through the Joint Committee. Over the course of the past year, some of the areas of cooperation have included co-sponsorship of and participation in a workshop at a conference of Arab businessmen held at Beirut in October 1997.

19. In the area of data collection and analysis, UNICEF has expressed its interest in continuing collaboration with the Pan Arab Project on Family Health (PAPFAM), the successor to the Pan-Arab Project on Maternal and Child Health (PAPCHILD). The main means of support would be through country offices, as well as through the UNICEF Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa.

D. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

20. Regular consultations at both Cairo and Geneva have been taking place between the UNCTAD and LAS secretariats aimed at expanding cooperation between them for the benefit of Arab countries.

21. At the request of LAS, two representatives of UNCTAD made a presentation of the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) customs efficiency programme at the Customs Committee Meeting organized by LAS at Cairo from 19 to 21 May 1997. The main objective of UNCTAD's presentation was to create awareness in the Arab region of the ASYCUDA programme and its importance for modernization of customs procedures and management with a view to improving efficient clearance and effective revenue collection.

22. A second meeting of the Customs Committee was held in Alexandria from 3 to 8 November 1997. The meeting discussed a variety of issues related to trade facilitation in general and customs computerization in particular.

23. The above meetings were organized by the secretariat of LAS and were attended by high-level customs representatives from Arab States. The conclusions of the meetings clearly demonstrate that there is a distinct need for cooperation between customs administrations in the Arab region, especially on coordination and computerization. At the second meeting, UNCTAD tabled a discussion paper with a proposal for closer cooperation on customs modernization, ASYCUDA, trade facilitation and the establishment of a permanent customs committee. The proposal needs to be further developed, and is currently being considered in the LAS secretariat.

24. At the OAU/LAS Third Afro-Arab Trade Fair, which took place at Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, from 6 to 12 December 1997, an UNCTAD expert participated in the preparatory committee and assisted in formulating a programme for the cooperation forum, particularly on issues related to the Arab world, WTO and international trade issues. Six UNCTAD experts assisted in conducting the cooperation forum and acted as resource persons. Representatives of all Arab countries and some African countries attended the meeting, which was chaired by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and LAS secretariats. An UNCTAD stand was set up, and relevant UNCTAD documentation was displayed. A large number of participants, most from Arab countries and some at the ministerial level, visited the stand and held substantive consultations with UNCTAD staff on trade issues.

25. In cooperation with UNDP, UNCTAD is implementing a programme of technical assistance for the benefit of Arab countries on a regional, subregional and national basis, focused particularly on investment, trade efficiency and the challenges of integration of the Arab countries into a multilateral, regional and interregional trading system.

E. United Nations Development Programme

26. Cooperation between UNDP and LAS takes place at two levels: at the level of direct contacts and cooperation with the secretariat of the League and at the level of regional and country-specific cooperation with the Arab States members of the League.

27. With regard to the former, during the period under review agreements have been reached about the content of the cooperation agreement between UNDP and LAS, and about shifting the nature of future collaboration between the two organizations from UNDP support for restructuring of the secretariat of the League to joint activities aimed at strengthening the environment for sustainable human development in the Arab region.

F. United Nations Environment Programme

28. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has continued to implement project activities, together with LAS and its specialized organizations, in the following main areas: (a) combating desertification and increasing green

areas; (b) combating industrial pollution; (c) environmental education, awareness and information; (d) conservation of biological diversity; (e) establishment of a network of environmental information; and (f) human settlements.

29. A joint expert meeting on the use of remote sensing techniques was held in conjunction with the Regional Office of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and ACSAD. In addition, a training workshop on techniques on water catchments was held in Morocco in conjunction with the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development; a training manual has been developed based on the results.

30. On the subject of cleaner industrial production and environmentally sound management of waste, general guidelines for permissible limits of industrial pollutants are being finalized after a series of expert workshops held in conjunction with the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization.

31. In response to the need for increased public awareness and capacity-building, a series of projects have been undertaken, including a scientific symposium, an educational workshop on primary school curriculum development (in cooperation with the Arab League's Education, Culture and Science Organization (ALECSO)); and an Arabic-language newsletter jointly produced with the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE).

32. The collection, screening and storage of accurate environmental information is a continuing challenge. Joint expert workshops have been held on the subject, as well as on the formulation of sustainable development indicators. These are first positive steps towards the establishment of an environmental database for the region. ACSAD and CAMRE are among collaborating centres in the production of the 1999 volume of UNEP's regionally based environment report, the *Global Environment Outlook*.

33. An expert meeting on the environmental management of urban and rural areas was held in conjunction with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Organization of Arab Cities and the technical secretariat of the Council of Arab Housing and Reconstruction Ministers. The resulting report evaluates the state of the region's urban environment, and identifies the best means of coping with deteriorating conditions.

34. Overall, cooperation between UNEP and the League in implementing regional programmes for environmental protection and sustainable development has proved to be very successful, with tangible results. Regional awareness and participation have grown, and meaningful and useful regional infrastructures have evolved to meet the challenges being faced in this area.

G. United Nations Population Fund

35. With the ongoing process of preparation for the five-year review following the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) of the achievements towards ICPD goals, cooperation between LAS and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in coordination with ESCWA, has continued this year. UNFPA and LAS continue to explore additional ways to strengthen the capabilities of member countries for the formulation of enabling policies and strategies for successful implementation of programmes of action.

36. Accordingly, UNFPA is collaborating with LAS and ESCWA in the preparation of the Arab Population Conference on the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. UNFPA and LAS also continued their cooperation in the area of data collection and analysis.

37. UNFPA support to LAS has continued, allowing the completion of a number of activities, including the evaluation of the five-year technical assistance to the Population Research Unit, which was established in 1975 following a recommendation by the Population Conference for Arab Countries.

38. 1998 marks the completion of the regional Pan-Arab Project on Maternal and Child Health (PAPCHILD) survey, which began in 1993 and was co-sponsored by LAS, the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Agencies (AGFUND), UNICEF, WHO and the International Planned Parenthood Foundation, with technical input from the United Nations. With the implementation of the Morocco study, the last of nine surveys, this regional programme was able to complement the basic maternal health and family planning modules with a new approach better suited to address the post-ICPD emerging concepts. The new instruments aim at collecting data on an expanded range of reproductive health aspects, including those pertaining to sexually transmitted diseases and human immunodeficiency syndrome/human immunodeficiency virus knowledge and behaviour. PAPCHILD has been and continues to be an instrumental input to policy development and evaluation for the countries in the region.

39. A more advanced approach to data collection was elaborated for the follow-on generation of the regional survey programme, the Pan Arab Project on Family Health (PAPFAM). PAPFAM incorporates, in addition to its

comprehensive reproductive health dimension, full-fledged qualitative studies addressing such areas as the quality of services, hospital-based morbidity and the linkage between various sources of reproductive health data.

40. UNFPA cooperation with LAS has so far been very fruitful. UNFPA will continue to strengthen this cooperation at an institutional level by involving all the relevant departments and units within the League to follow up and optimize the ability of Governments to implement the national action plans of United Nations conferences, and advocate the ratification and endorsement of international conventions by these Governments.

H. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

41. UNRWA, which directly provides essential education, health care, relief assistance and social services to 3.5 million registered Palestine refugees in the Middle East, has long enjoyed a close cooperative relationship with the Arab League. The Agency maintains contact with the Arab League secretariat at Cairo, and with the Permanent Observer of the Arab League in New York; participates in regular sectoral meetings organized by the Arab League; and seeks to foster exchanges between its officials and the Arab League secretariat at various levels and in various forums.

42. In the education sector, the seventh annual joint meeting between UNRWA and the Arab League Council of Educational Affairs for the Children of Palestine was held at Cairo in December 1997 to review education services offered to Palestine refugees in the host countries and issues facing the UNRWA education programme.

43. UNRWA's critical financial situation and the role of the Agency in the current context remained the subject of considerable discussion in Arab League forums during the period under review. The League reiterated its strong support for the Agency's humanitarian activities, concern over the repeated funding shortfalls faced by the Agency and their implications for the Palestine refugees and the host authorities, and the importance of increased contributions to the Agency by the international community. UNRWA appreciated the continuing efforts by the League, including by its Secretary-General, to assist the Agency in fund-raising initiatives.

44. UNRWA continued to benefit from the generous financial support of the Arab League and its continuing efforts to urge donors to increase voluntary contributions to the Agency. In 1997, Arab League member States contributed $13.5 million to the Agency's regular budget and extrabudgetary special assistance programmes. The Arab League Council of Ministers reaffirmed its resolution 4645 of 6 April 1997, in which it called upon Arab League member States to increase their contributions to the 1981 level of 7.73 per cent of the Agency's regular budget.

I. International Labour Organization

45. The International Labour Organization (ILO) maintained close cooperation with LAS, in particular with its specialized agency, the Arab Labour Organization (ALO), through joint activities and coordination of action related to issues of common interest.

46. During the period under review, joint ILO/ALO seminars were organized on the following topics: employment and emerging changes in the Arab region, and the role of trade unions in promoting social dialogue (Tunis, November 1997); mechanisms of vocational training curriculum development in the context of rapid changes in the labour market (Damascus, November 1997); the role of employers' organizations in dealing with economic and social changes at the regional and international levels (Dubai, November 1997); and the development of the role of employment offices (Beirut, May 1997).

47. Furthermore, the ILO has provided technical and financial assistance to the Regional Arab Programme for Labour Administration (RAPLA), which is now managed by ALO. The two institutions also collaborated in the implementation of an ILO/UNDP regional programme on the support of Arab migration policies, which was completed in March 1997.

J. World Health Organization

48. The Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO) continued its close collaboration with the League of Arab States (LAS), in particular the Council of Arab Ministers of Health. The WHO/EMRO Regional Director attended all the regular meetings of this Council. Various technical units in the Regional Office participated in the finalization of the Arab Strategy for Health Development and the Arab Pharmacopoeia, and attended several technical meetings organized by the technical secretariat of the Council of Arab Ministers of Health. WHO continued close collaboration in several technical areas, some examples of which are described below.

49. WHO/EMRO continued its cooperation with LAS in various facets of reproductive, family and community health. The Gulf Family Health Survey, PAPCHILD and PAPFAM are excellent examples of close collaboration of the Regional Office with the League of Arab States, as well as other concerned agencies, such as AGFUND, UNFPA and UNICEF.

50. Close collaboration is ongoing with the Arab Labour Organization through providing necessary technical backstopping for developing databases on occupational diseases and work accidents in member States. Cooperation with LAS continues, particularly in matters of environmental impact of industrial activity and air quality guidelines. Working relations are ongoing through CAMRE.

K. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

51. The Cairo Office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) maintains close cooperation with some of the specialized agencies of the Arab League, such as the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and ACSAD. Below are examples of this cooperation during the period under review.

52. The UNESCO Cairo Office cooperated with ALECSO and other partners in organizing the Seventh Regional Meeting of the Arab National Committees of the International Hydrological Programme and Workshop on Integration of Isotope Field Investigations into Water Projects in Water-Scarce Areas, held at Rabat from 8 to 12 September 1997.

53. Cooperating with ALECSO in its project to enhance the potential for the development of groundwater resources in the Eastern Sahara area using satellite radar images, the UNESCO Cairo Office held the annual meeting of a project on sand accumulation and groundwater in the Eastern Sahara at Cairo from 19 to 21 October 1997.

54. The UNESCO Cairo Office organized a regional meeting of the Arab Man and the Biosphere Network at Amman from 22 to 25 June 1997, which was co-sponsored by ACSAD.

55. In the field of culture, UNESCO is engaged in consultations with the general secretariat of the League of Arab States with a view to safeguarding the historic, religious and cultural monuments of the Old City of Jerusalem.

L. World Bank

56. The cooperation between the World Bank and LAS has continued to be close and productive. In addition to participating in the periodic general meetings on cooperation between the specialized agencies of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States, the World Bank has specifically cooperated with LAS in the following areas: provision to LAS of World Bank research papers and other reports and publications; periodic consultation between World Bank staff and LAS staff on the preparation work for the launching of the Arab Free Trade Zone initiative; continued collaboration between the specialized agencies of the World Bank and LAS on important developmental and other sectoral issues; and participation by LAS senior staff in a comprehensive course prepared by the World Bank Economic Development Institute on global integration and the new trade agenda.

M. World Meteorological Organization

57. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has continued to maintain close cooperation and effective coordination in the field of meteorology and operational hydrology with LAS and its specialized organizations, in particular with ACSAD. WMO participates in and contributes to the meetings and activities of the LAS Permanent Committee on Meteorology and its various working groups.

58. In particular, WMO and LAS have sponsored a symposium on sand and dust storms at Damascus during September 1997; are developing a regional project in the Arab countries for the forecasting of sand and dust storms, with a total cost of about US$ 6 million; are planning the preparation of an Arabic climatic atlas; are cooperating in the development of an integrated system for the exchange of meteorological data and products between Arab countries; have completed the preparation of a comprehensive catalogue containing the meteorological telecommunication systems in all Arab countries; and are cooperating in the training of Palestinian meteorological personnel and in the establishment of a national meteorological service within the Palestinian National Authority.

59. WMO is cooperating with ACSAD in two regional projects in the Arab countries for capacity-building in water resources management and the development of geophysical geographical information systems.

N. International Fund for Agricultural Development

60. IFAD has continued to provide financial support to the specialized agencies of LAS. In 1997, IFAD began implementation of a technical assistance grant of US$ 1.15 million to the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), ACSAD and the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) to provide technical backstopping to a number of ongoing IFAD-funded projects in the Arab League countries. Still ongoing is an IFAD grant of US$ 1 million for the Date Palm Research and Development Network Programme, which seeks to build knowledge of and strengthen regional scientific capacity for this traditional tree crop.

61. IFAD's newest initiative, now in the planning stages, is a collaborative effort with the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development (AFESD) to create a consultative group for poverty reduction in Arab States. This is in line with the recommendations of the 1997 United Nations-LAS general meeting, which called upon participants working in agriculture and rural development to improve mechanisms of cooperation and conclusion of formal cooperation. Through this consultative group, in which other interested donors and all concerned member States will be asked to participate, AFESD and IFAD hope to assist Governments in allocating resources and mobilizing assistance.

O. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

62. LAS and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are pursuing efforts to strengthen their cooperation and coordination, primarily in areas relating to refugees and more generally in relation to global humanitarian issues of common interest. A draft cooperation agreement is being finalized, and will be submitted to both organizations for final approval.

63. Since 1996, contacts and consultations have continued between LAS and UNHCR to identify the most appropriate solutions to critical refugee situations in the Arab region. Cooperation between the two organizations involved other concerned parties and permitted the resolution of complex problems in a coordinated manner.

64. Efforts are also being made to further explore how collaborative activities could be jointly carried out by LAS and UNHCR, notably in the following areas: the organization of a regional conference on refugees and asylum seekers in the region; follow-up to previous initiatives taken in close collaboration with ALECSO to determine areas of cooperation in the field of educational assistance to refugees; exchange of expertise, documents and reports on respective policies and operations; and the convening of seminars and conferences on refugee law and basic principles of international protection.

IV. Sectoral meeting on trade and development between the United Nations and the League of Arab States

65. As recommended by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/5 and in accordance with the decisions of the 1997 United Nations-LAS general meeting on cooperation, a sectoral meeting on trade and development between the United Nations and the League of Arab States was held at LAS headquarters at Cairo from 8 to 11 June 1998.

66. Representatives of the following bodies of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States participated in the meeting:

(a) United Nations system: ESCWA, UNDP, UNCTAD, WTO, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations Secretariat (Department of Political Affairs);

(b) League of Arab States: ACSAD, ALO, BADEA, AFESD, the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development, AIDMO, AGFUND and the LAS Department of Political and International Affairs.

67. The following Arab countries took part in the meeting: Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Oman, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Egypt, Morocco and Yemen. Representatives of the Palestine National Authority, the European Union, the Saudi Development Fund, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Islamic Development Bank, the Arab Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, the Arab Investors Union, the Union of Arab Banks, the Arab Investment Guarantee Corporation, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, the Arab Council of Economic Union and the Arab Trade Financing Programme (Arab Monetary Fund) were also present.

68. The meeting was co-chaired by the Assistant Secretary-General for International Political Affairs of the League of Arab States and the Executive Secretary of ESCWA. The participants discussed 11 working papers,

reviewed progress in cooperation in the field of trade and development, and made a number of recommendations for future action. Consultations on cooperation between the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and the LAS Department of Political and International Affairs were held informally at the meeting.

United Nations A/53/435

General Assembly

Distr.: General
25 September 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session
Agenda item 34
Cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Cooperation Organization

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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report was prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 52/19 on cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). In the same resolution, the Assembly urged the organizations of the United Nations system to continue and increase consultation and cooperation with the Economic Cooperation Organization and its associated institutions in the attainment of their objectives; it also invited the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), as the regional arm of the United Nations, to assume a more active role in promoting cooperation with the Economic Cooperation Organization.

2. A brief summary of the current status of cooperation between the Economic Cooperation Organization and the organizations of the United Nations system is given below.

II. United Nations Development Programme

3. In 1997, the Executive Heads of ECO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) exchanged official visits and both organizations agreed to undertake a joint project on support to ECO member countries in trade efficiency and economic cooperation, to be funded by UNDP. As executing agency for the project, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) undertook with ECO a follow-up joint ECO/UNCTAD mission to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan from 4 to 14 March 1998, in order to explore the opportunities for cooperation in the fields of trade efficiency, trade and transport facilitation, and reforms and modernization of customs procedures among the ECO member States. A second joint mission to Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was undertaken in May 1998 and the report was distributed to member countries in July 1998.

4. UNDP has also prepared a project document on capacity-building of the ECO secretariat, which is currently under consideration by ECO.

5. Under a joint UNDP/United Nations Institute for Training and Research project, a guide book has been prepared about ECO countries and their economies. It is primarily meant for use in the Web site and is to be regularly updated by the ECO secretariat.

6. UNDP has also funded a study on the economies and resource complementarities of the ECO member States, which assesses existing and potential prospects for a closer

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economic relationship, especially in the energy, trade and investment fields among the ECO member countries.

III. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

7. Cooperation between ESCAP and ECO was formalized with the signing in 1993 of a memorandum of understanding, which was based on the Treaty of Izmir and the terms of reference of ESCAP. In the memorandum of understanding, ESCAP and ECO agreed to cooperate in managing development issues of mutual concern; to implement joint projects, including seminars, workshops and meetings; to share analytical reports and technical publications; to exchange information and ideas; and to provide inputs to their respective subsidiary bodies. In addition, the two organizations decided to have annual consultations at the senior Professional level with a view to developing joint project proposals.

8. ESCAP and ECO agreed to foster cooperation in several areas and have undertaken to facilitate cooperation between other relevant bodies established by the two organizations, such as the ECO Trade and Development Bank, ECO Reinsurance Pool, ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry, ECO Preferential Tariff System, and the regional institutions of ESCAP, namely, the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology, the Regional Coordination Centre for Research and Development of Coarse Grains, Pulses, Roots and Tuber Crops in the Humid Tropics of Asia and the Pacific, the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Network for Agricultural Machinery.

9. The provision of reliable and efficient land transport services has always been crucial for the economic integration of the ECO subregion, which includes seven landlocked countries. Cooperation between ESCAP and ECO in this sector goes back to 1993, when ESCAP provided an input into the Outline Plan for the Development of the Transport Sector in the ECO Region. Of the more recent ESCAP activities in transport and in the context of Commission resolution 52/11 of 24 April 1996 on the strengthening of subregional economic cooperation among the south-western States members of the Commission, including the States members of the Economic Cooperation Organization, ESCAP cooperated with ECO in formulating a project on transport development in the ECO region, for funding by the Islamic Development Bank and joint execution by ECO, ESCAP and UNCTAD. The project aims at promoting multimodal transport and facilitating international land transport movement across the subregion, as well as the development of a legal and regulatory system for efficient transport.

10. In addition, an ESCAP project on strengthening subregional economic cooperation in trade and investment among the south-western States members of the Commission, aims to assist ECO countries in exploiting new trade and investment opportunities provided by the progressive development of physical infrastructure in the ECO region. The project is being implemented in consultation with ECO and has received funding on a cost-sharing basis from the Government of the Netherlands and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB).

11. A study commissioned under the project will focus on the requirements of ECO countries in "soft infrastructure" for trade and investment, including border and non-border measures. With respect to non-border measures, the study will look into the legal and administrative regimes influencing trade and investment in ECO countries, with a view to advocating greater conformance between policies and business practices. The study is to be followed by a subregional seminar on the application of concepts and designs which have the potential of increasing the flow of, and improving access to, commercially viable information. Particular attention will be given to networking arrangements and facilitation measures, such as the use of standard formats, software and other information requisites adapted to the particular needs of small and medium-sized enterprises.

12. The participation of ECO in the annual consultations among the executive heads of subregional organizations has opened new avenues for cooperation not only with ESCAP, which coordinates those meetings and provides them with substantive servicing, but also with other subregional organizations. A case study on the promotion of trade and investment cooperation between the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and ECO, undertaken by ESCAP at the joint request of the Secretaries-General of ECO and ASEAN, was submitted to the executive heads at their third consultative meeting. Another study, entitled "A suggested framework for promoting economic interdependence and organizational linkages", was prepared by ESCAP for submission to the same meeting.

13. The third consultative meeting identified certain areas where ECO could benefit from the multidisciplinary expertise of ESCAP and its ability to provide backstopping services in the execution of subregional projects. Thus, ECO attaches great importance to sharing the experience gained by ESCAP in involving the private sector in the development

ıd operation of infrastructure projects, such as through the sia Infrastructure Development Alliance (AIDA), which promoted by ESCAP. Taking into account the ongoing ɔnsultations between ECO, ESCAP, UNCTAD and the conomic Commission for Europe, the ECO secretariat ıggested that the following five main areas should be overed under joint projects: (a) corridor studies to etermine the non-tariff and physical impediments to the free ıovement of transport; (b) promotion of accession to nternational conventions in the field of land transport; (c) levelopment of transport facilitation agreements; (d) human esources development for freight forwarding and nultimodal transport; and (e) implementation of the Advance Cargo Information System programme in selected countries.

14. With regard to trade and investment, opportunities for technical cooperation between ESCAP and ECO are being explored in the following areas: developing a subregional database, strengthening inter-subregional financial linkages, using training facilities, institution- and capacity-building, managing trade policy issues, replicating successful experience in "growth triangles", and preparing an inventory of and monitoring restrictive trade practices.

15. ESCAP is also seeking cooperation with ECO in the implementation of a project on investment promotion for the mining industry in the ECO countries. The objectives of the project were determined during a mission undertaken to ECO headquarters by the ESCAP Regional Adviser on Mineral Policy and Mineral Economics. The mission had been requested by the Secretary-General of ECO in December 1996. It covered economic assessment of mineral potential, identification of prominent targets for development and trade, and review of mineral development policies in ECO countries. These and other issues will be discussed at an international round table conference.

16. ECO has already approached IDB concerning the funding of the project. The Bank has expressed interest in joining a group of organizations and agencies that would participate technically and financially in the project and thus back up its credibility.

17. In response to General Assembly resolutions 51/121 and 52/19, a report of the Executive Secretary of ESCAP on cooperation with ECO (E/ESCAP/1091), reviewing the collaboration between the two organizations, was submitted for consideration by the Commission at its fifty-fourth session, which was held in Bangkok from 16 to 22 April 1998.

18. Following its review of the report of the Executive Secretary of ESCAP on cooperation with the ECO, the Commission expressed appreciation for the support provided by the secretariat to ECO.[1] It recommended that practical steps should be taken to promote inter-subregional cooperation in the identified areas as a follow-up to the third Consultative Meeting among Executive Heads of Subregional Organizations and ESCAP, held at Tehran in May 1997.

19. The Commission noted that, as a result of the case study prepared by the secretariat on the promotion of trade and investment cooperation between ASEAN and ECO, the two organizations had agreed to institutionalize a relationship between their respective chambers of commerce, exchange representatives of the private sector, and hold the ASEAN-ECO workshop on international trade.

20. The Commission took note of the statement made on behalf of the Secretary-General of ECO and duly reciprocated the interest expressed by him in pursuing cooperation with ESCAP within the scope defined by the memorandum of understanding. It also noted that the secretariat was invited to consider taking part in some other projects of interest to ECO, including (a) projects on the environmental rehabilitation of the Caspian Sea and Aral Sea basins; (b) technical assistance and mobilization of financial resources and the relevant multilateral funds to address problems such as desertification, land degradation and the conservation of biological diversity; and (c) assistance in bringing into operation the Drug Control Unit financed by the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, particularly with regard to the establishment of a drug data bank and training facilities.

IV. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

21. UNCTAD is an active partner in the ECO/ESCAP/IDB/UNCTAD inter-agency project on international transport development in the ECO region. It is also the executing agency for the UNDP-sponsored project on support to ECO member countries in trade efficiency and economic cooperation, mentioned in paragraph 3 above. Currently, a draft memorandum of understanding on the relationship between ECO and UNCTAD is in preparation.

V. United Nations Population Fund

22. A conference organized jointly by ECO and the United Nations Population Fund on male involvement in reproductive health and family planning was held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 20 to 24 September 1998. It was the fourth joint event in a series of conferences relating to women's status and health (Tehran, August 1995); reproductive health (Islamabad, April 1996); and implementation of the programme of action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Almaty, April 1996).

VI. United Nations International Drug Control Programme

23. A project document on the establishment of a Drug Control Coordination Unit in the ECO secretariat was signed between the ECO Secretary-General and the Executive Director of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme in Vienna on 5 March 1998, during an official visit of the Secretary-General of ECO to the Programme's headquarters. This project, which will last one year, commenced in July 1998.

VII. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations

24. A memorandum of understanding between ECO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was signed by the Secretary-General of ECO and the Director-General of FAO in Tehran on 8 December 1997, during their visit to Tehran for the summit of the Organization of Islamic Conference.

VIII. United Nations Industrial Development Organization

25. Following an official visit by the Secretary-General of ECO to the headquarters of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in Vienna in March 1998, UNIDO proposed the following two industrial projects for the ECO region:

(a) Programme for technology capacity-building in the ECO member States;

(b) Regional investment programme for ECO member countries.

26. UNIDO has also offered assistance for two other projects, namely investment promotion assistance for Kazakhstan, and integrated investment promotion for Tajikistan.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1998, Supplement No. 20* (E/1998/40).